

The Thirties

It was true, of course, that MacDonald was an electioneering asset. In the constituencies his appearance was much admired. Women especially found him impressive. He appealed to them. The only conversation between Asquith and Mr. Lloyd George after their quarrel, is supposed to have taken place in the House of Commons on the occasion of MacDonald's first appearance as Premier, when Mr. Lloyd George leant across to Asquith and said: 'MacDonald thinks he is the best-looking Premier of the century. Do you agree?' and Asquith answered: 'No.' These were interested parties. Probably a majority of the electorate would have supported MacDonald's claim. His dramatisation of himself as a lonely idealist who felt it to be his duty to play a part in public life against his own inclination, was congenial. People were sick of ambitious soldiers and hard-faced business men and deceitful lawyers. They thirsted for a little culture and high-mindedness. MacDonald provided these. He managed to convey the impression that if he had his way he would be living quietly at Lossiemouth with his books. As he put it in his own inimitable idiom: 'Take a walk in your library, guided by your imagination, enlivened by suggestions which come to you from a phrase—exploring, exploring to be alone, going wandering and roaming and dreaming alone.' It was the right note.

An idea of the esteem in which he was held is given by an article entitled 'Ramsay MacDonald—the Dreamer who Triumphed', by Professor Harold Laski, later one of the Left Book Club Triumvirate, which was published in the *Daily Herald* early in 1930:

Mr. MacDonald is perhaps the most complex
personality in
contemporary political life.

... He lives in a remote citadel which the
outsider cannot
storm. You cannot conquer MacDonald's
confidence; you
have to win it piece by piece.

But when it is finally won, it is difficult to lose.
He has
the art of keeping his friends. . . .

Widely read, widely travelled, a popular orator
of the first
order, a man with an obvious gift of stirring
great public